



Getting Back to Life!

after Degenerative Disc Disease

BY DARCY LADUE-VARGAS

BEN Mattson felt a surge of adrenaline as he rounded the corner into Soldier Field Stadium in Chicago. He had already climbed over monster truck tires, crawled under police barricades, and traversed monkey bars in the 2010 Chicago Men's Health Urbanathlon. Staring back at him were nearly 1,000 stairs that he was about to ascend and descend. When he finished the stairs, he still had to scale a city bus and climb over an eight foot wall. On the other side of that wall was the finish line and a huge accomplishment for Ben who just a few years prior struggled to lift his infant son.

In 2005, Ben injured his back and suddenly found himself unable to do the things he loved to do. An avid golfer, Ben could no longer swing the golf club. He watched from the porch as his wife worked on their landscaping projects alone. And when his son was born in 2006, he struggled to lift him and help care for him. For over two years doctors were unable to pinpoint the problem. After countless physical therapy visits and multiple injections, Ben was beginning to give up hope that he would ever have a normal life again.

Frustrated with the limitations being imposed on his life by constant back pain, Ben came to see Dr. Bruce Bartie of St. Croix Orthopaedics in June of 2007. Dr. Bartie reviewed Ben's MRI and discovered that Ben was suffering from degenerative disc disease. Dr. Bartie offered Ben several options. One option was a fusion, but that would end any chance for Ben to golf again and would likely result in further fusions down the road. Instead, Dr. Bartie suggested a newer

to bounce back quickly was important to Ben. His pain from the surgery was tolerable and he was able to stop pain medications quickly. After six months of physical therapy at the Courage Center, life was beginning to return to normal for Ben.

Once thinking he would never golf again, Ben eagled a par 4 hole just two years after having surgery. "Being able to drive the green was an amazing feeling," Ben recalled.

"It was an emotional moment for me when I found out I could get my life back," Ben recalled. "Dr. Bartie was the first doctor who had been able to find the problem and give me a solution and hope."

technology by Synthes that would actually replace the damaged disc in his back with a prosthetic implant. "Ben was young and active enough to be a candidate for this leading edge procedure," explained Dr. Bartie. "In Ben's case, an implant would likely restore his ability to do the things he wanted to do."

"It was an emotional moment for me when I found out I could get my life back," Ben recalled. "Dr. Bartie was the first doctor who had been able to find the problem and give me a solution and hope." Ben underwent surgery and had a Synthes Prodisc-L implanted in his L5-S1 space. Ben describes the entire experience as "awesome." He was back to work ten days later. His job as a marketing and social media consultant for Chipotle requires lots of travel so being able

"I wasn't sure I would ever swing a club again so to be out enjoying a round of golf is incredible."

In 2010, Ben ran his first 5K, did his first triathlon, and even competed in an ultimate physical challenge—the Chicago Men's Health Urbanathlon. Ben shows no sign of slowing down in 2011. He finished the Minneapolis Triathlon seventeen minutes faster than his goal, leapt over fire and scrambled under barbed wire in the Warrior Dash race, and splashed through mud in the Mud Run MS Twin Cities 10K.

"The biggest impact in my life isn't the ability to do these races," Ben reflected. "What I'm most thankful for is being able to be the dad I always wanted to be. I'm able to play with my two kids and enjoy life with my wife and family." ■

Lumbar artificial disc replacement surgery:

Lumbar artificial disc replacement surgery is a treatment option for patients suffering from degenerative disc disease at the lumbar spine who have failed to improve with conservative treatment. Prior to the development of artificial discs, the only surgical option was a customary fusion. The goal of a disc prosthesis is to maintain mobility, restore normal function of the spine, and bring about a clear reduction in pain.

For more information on artificial disc replacement surgery, visit www.stcroixortho.com and click on the Education tab.



Ben is pictured biking and running during his first Triathlon event (swim-bike-run) after his lumbar disc replacement.

Ben had a Synthes Prodisc-L (pictured to the left) implanted in his L5-S1 space.

